

**PRESENTATION BY LES GROBER, ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAM  
MANAGER, STATE WATER RESOURCES CONTROL BOARD, AT THE  
30 NOVEMBER 2006 MEETING OF THE CENTRAL VALLEY SALINITY  
POLICY GROUP**

Salinity Crisis in the Central Valley

Why a Crisis? It's important not to overstate the nature of the problem. We are surrounded by crises. Is this a crisis?

What it's not:

It's not a crisis in the vein of an earthquake, flood, or levee breach. It's not a Katrina-like disaster. These types of crises, fortunately, are now much in the forefront for the public and decision-makers. And moneys are being made available and actions are being taken to prepare for these crises—the recent flood control bond, for example... though, of course, more is always needed.

The salinity crisis, in many ways, is a far worse crisis because it's not associated with a clear event. It's a slow downward spiral with ever increasing salinity. Recall Dr. Longley's slide showing the long term increase in SJR salinity. It's a crisis specifically because by the time more damage is done it will become much more difficult and expensive to remedy. With this crisis you also don't necessarily know everything you'll be losing until it's lost.

And since this is a much more pernicious and slowly emerging crisis than floods and earthquakes, it is likely to continue to get few resources devoted to its prevention.

Salinity crises, in the past, have quite literally, led to the downfall of civilizations. Are we smart enough to do something about it this time around?

What we can expect to lose:

Beneficial use of waters: surface and groundwater- this will result in lost economies (impacts to farms, cities and business)

Affected area:

- Surface and groundwater basins of Central Valley

- The Delta (with associated risks of earthquake, flood, and operational constraints)
- Areas supplied by the Delta

#### Current Losers:

- Farmers: increasing salt in soils and supply water- lost productivity; increasing regulation and cost
- Cities and business: increased cost of providing safe and secure water supplies; increased regulatory costs
- Environment: flow manipulations to manage salt in conflict with species protection

#### Future winners:

All of the above if willing to accept initial costs...

What else is going on?

What is State Water Board doing?

Working with Central Valley Board on this Central Valley Salinity process...

...but also continuing to conduct related water quality control planning for the Bay and Delta. The Board as part of its water quality control planning for the Bay and Delta just yesterday released a revised draft water quality control plan for San Francisco Bay / Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Estuary.

This Plan identifies a number of emerging issues including:

- Pelagic Organism Decline
- Climate Change
- San Joaquin River Flows (links with anadromous fish and Delta fish)
- Delta and Central Valley Salinity

Why do I mention these other issues? These issues represent additional related and competing needs.

They are related in that there have been linkages identified between the POD and salinity and how water is manipulated in the Delta. Some of this

manipulation is done for salinity control. Climate Change will impose a new host of salinity related problems in the Central Valley and Delta.

Manipulation of SJR flows affects how we are able to export salts from the SJR Basin.

The plan also calls out the fact that additional data and studies may be needed for a wide range of topics including Delta salinity. A workshop for southern Delta salinity has been scheduled for January 16 and 19, 2007. The purpose of this workshop is to commence a proceeding regarding the southern Delta salinity objectives for agriculture that are contained in the current Water Quality Control Plan.

At the workshop, the State Water Board will receive information and conduct detailed discussions on the southern Delta salinity objectives. As a result of this workshop, the State Water Board will, if there is adequate justification, develop and manage a thorough study or studies of the sources, concentrations, loads, and effects of salinity, and methods for its control in the southern Delta.

A workshop for the POD will be scheduled for March or April.

But more than anything, this update to the plan sets the stage for targeted Plan updates to address the most critical issues facing the Delta.

These are competing needs because each one of these will also require planning and infrastructure costs

A new way of balancing these competing needs, at least in the Delta, is the Delta Vision—In September, The governor signed legislation and an Executive Order to Develop Strategic Vision for Delta (EXECUTIVE ORDER S-17-06)

SB 1574 will create a cabinet-level committee chaired by the Secretary of the Resources Agency and include the Secretary of the Business, Transportation, and Housing Agency, the Secretary for Environmental Protection, the Secretary of Food and Agriculture, the President of the Public Utilities Commission, the Director of the Department of Finance and the Director of the Office of Planning and Research to develop a plan for a sustainable delta.

The bill requires the strategic vision developed by the committee including the following factors:

- A. Sustainable ecosystem functions, including aquatic and terrestrial flora and fauna.
- B. Sustainable land use and land use patterns.
- C. Sustainable transportation uses, including streets, roads and highways and waterborne transportation.
- D. Sustainable utility uses, including aqueducts, pipelines and power transmission corridors.
- E. Sustainable water supply uses.
- F. Sustainable recreation uses, including current and future recreational and tourism uses.
- G. Sustainable flood management strategies.
- H. Other aspects of sustainability deemed desirable by the committee.

The Executive Order creates a Delta Vision Committee appointed by the Governor that includes designated Cabinet members and the President of the PUC and is chaired by the Secretary for Resources. The Delta Vision Committee will select a Stakeholder Coordination Group to advise the Blue Ribbon Task Force and Delta Vision Committee in developing conservation and economic strategies capable of sustaining the Delta as an economic and environmental resource of local, state and national significance.

Members of the Stakeholder Coordination Group will be drawn from diverse organizations representing stakeholders that are knowledgeable on issues relating to the topical areas cited by the Executive Order. The Committee had their first public meeting on Monday.

So what are impediments to solution? They are:

- Competing problems
- Competing interests
- Something for everyone to lose (at least initially)
- Classic “tragedy of the commons”
- With no clear solutions (or certainly no clear painless solutions)

Just as the key to the Delta Vision is sustainability, so too must sustainability be the key to salinity management.

The challenge is to duplicate something along the lines of the Santa Ana River Watershed Regional Salt Management Plan but on a much larger scale. The plan for the Central Valley will need to be crafted in the larger, and much more varied interests of the Central Valley and Delta.

The State Water Board is prepared to take a leadership role to help that this happens.